A Pennsylvania German 'Sprachinsel' Near Arthur, Illinois

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The settlements of the Amish and Mennonite sects with their numerous subdivisions (1) have gradually spread all over the United States. Not only their religious, folk-loristic and sociological aspects are important, but also their linguistic ones. Originally in all these settlements the Pennsylvania German dialect was spoken. It is now being given up in the Mennonite settlement, as I could see in Sterling, Illinois. Only the Amish Old Order still use it almost exclusively among themselves.

The Amish sect is named after its founder Jakob Amman, minister of the Swiss Mennonite Church, who thought it too liberal, especially in the matter of "shunning." Amish people, principally from the Palatinate and Switzerland, arrived in the United States around 1730. By the time of the Revolutionary War, the immigration had ceased. Amish family names of this period are: Hostatler, Peachey (Pitsche), Stutzman, Zug (Zook), Mast. (2) No foreign addition to the American Amish settlements was made until near the middle of the 19th century. Between 1820 and 1850 Amish immigrants from Alsace-Lorraine, Bavaria, Hesse-Darmstadt arrived. Family names characteristic for this period are: Naffziger, Schrock, Guengerich, Stucki, etc. The earliest Amish congregation in the United States was established in Berks Co., Pa., along North Kill Creek in 1735.

The Amish Old Order is the sect that is most conservative, and strictest in its restraints upon the personal lives of its members. The wearing of "plain" clothes, i. e. black coats and broad-brimmed hats, hooks and eyes ("hafte") instead of buttons, is required for the men. The wearing of simple dresses with aprons and a white "devotional covering" on their heads is required for women. No automobiles, telephones and radios must be owned. Typewriters and tractors are not forbidden though. The Amish Old Order do not even worship in churches, but meet in farm-houses. Horse and buggy days are still in existence for them. Much from the pioneer era seems still to be prevalent in their way of living. I mention only their pioneer hospitality towards strangers, their independent actions in many matters; e. g. inquests without the local sheriff, the custom of "bundling" among the young people (discussed in their own church paper). It is the sincere desire of the Amish to remain separate from "the world" in order to be able to live peacefully, conforming to their religious beliefs, which also forbid them to bear arms.

Not the least important means of staying apart from the world is their use of a dialect the "world" does not understand. If it were not for this unique purpose, the dialect would be dying out among the Amish as it is among the Mennonites, and the German character of the sect and its settlements abolished within a few decades. The Pennsylvania German dialect has been spoken among the Amish for more than 200 years. Wherever an Amish settlement is in existence, it forms a linguistic unit of its own, a **Sprachinsel**, a language-island, which is surrounded by English speaking communities. We have Amish **Sprachinseln** of this type in many states: in Ohio in Holmes (about a thousand families), Stark, Geauga, Madison, Defiance counties; in Delaware at Dover; in Virginia at Lynnhaven, Portsmouth, in Maryland at Oakland; in Indiana at Lagrange, Middlebury, Goshen, in Marshal, Howard, Newton Adams, Allen, Daviess, Oscoda counties; in Iowa in Buchanan and Johnson counties; in Wisconsin in Taylor Co.; in Kansas in Sumner, Anderson, Reno counties; in Oklahoma at Thomas, Weatherford, in Mayes Co., in North Dakota at Wolford and Lumberton; in Ontario, Canada, in Perth and Waterloo counties. Some of these communities in the western states have been founded in recent years, the poorer members of the old settlements are always on the look-out for cheaper lands farther West. The United States census does not recognize the fact that a large number of native-born Americans have a mother-tongue different from English. This makes an accurate estimate of the number of those speakers impossible. The Amish people whose native language is the Pennsylvania German dialect, would belong to this group, of course.

The Amish appeared in Illinois in 1829 first near Peoria and Bloomington. Their only settlement at the present time, and so the only Pennsylvania German **Sprachinsel** in Illinois, is near Arthur, about 30 miles from Decatur. It covers a large stretch of territory extending into three different counties, beyond Moultrie and Douglas County even into Coles County. The Amish own there some of the best farming country that is to be found in central Illinois. For many miles their big red-painted barns, close to nice looking white houses with high windmill-pumps, are the only view in sight. The settlement was founded in 1865 by Mose Yoder, Daniel Miller and Daniel Otto, who came with their families from Summit Mills in Somerset County, Pa. The town of Arthur, which has a population of 1800 now and is right in the center of the Amish settlement, did not exist then. They were the first Amish settlers, who came to Arthur. Others came from Holmes County, Ohio, (e. g. Daniel Schrock and family in 1870), from Indiana, Iowa (e. g. Mose Kauffman in 1868). The place had been selected in June 1864 by Bishop Fred Beachy of Grantsville, Md., and by Mose Yoder. The settlement grew continuously, as evidenced by the increase in the number of church districts: 2 in 1888 (Moultrie County part, Douglas County part), 3 in 1902, 4 in 1906, 5 in 1922, 6 in 1926, 7 in 1930, 8 at the present time (Schlabach West, East, North, South; Plank, Schrock; Mast West, East). There is continuous intercourse between Arthur and the Amish settlements in Indiana and Ohio: exchange of preachers, visiting of friends, intermarrying. H. F. Weber's (3) estimate of 3000 as the number of the total population of the settlement is probably too high. 2000 would seem to be more correct.

Outsiders near Arthur learn the dialect very rarely. An English farmer living among the Amish, who, incidentally, called them "the world's best neighbors," picked up some Pennsylvania German, and so did one drug-store clerk in Arthur. The Amish in Arthur all speak English too; they have the rare and valuable experience of being bilingual. Their English does not show any sound-substitutions; it is not "broken." Not even any accent is noticed by the people in Arthur. When their little children are sent to the small one-room country school-houses, they understand hardly any English. In some cases they learned a little English from older children in the family, or the parents taught them a few words, not to make it too "unhendig" (unhandy) for the teacher, as I was told. But, as a rule, the children hear nothing but Pennsylvania German in their homes, before they go to school. This is the only practicable method of making them bilingual. Any foreigner living in this country, who wants his children to be bilingual, can only get a similar result by imitating the Amish. Very few have had the energy and consistency to go through with this method.

But the linguistic situation in Arthur is even more complicated. Not only the Pennsylvania German dialect and English must be considered, but also High German. This is the language of the bibles that are used in the Amish services and of their song-books, and the language of many of their prayers. Formerly German was the language of the church as Pennsylvania German was the language of everyday conversation in all the Mennonite settlements, but it has been gradually replaced by English there. The remarkable success of the "uneducated" Amish in teaching their children the dialect and preserving it thus, is even surpassed by the signicance of the fact that the Amish give their children enough instruction in High German to enable them to read and write it, and to understand the bible and song-books. All other German groups elsewhere gave up the instruction of their language entirely, in many cases they did not even try to bring it back into the public high-schools, where it had been dropped because of the War. The Amish who have the reputation of being opposed to education, built with their own money near Arthur three white one room schoolhouses, each for about 25 children. Some tutoring in High German is done in the four summer months, when there is a vacation in the English school. Each winter in January and February for four to six weeks, German is taught there in Pennsylvania German to those who have finished the eighth grade of the English school. The age of the pupils is usually from 16 to 20. In the winter of 1937 in two of the three school-houses school was taught. The teacher is a farmer, who is paid by the parents of his pupils. After German school is over, each pupil receives a "souvenir" (instead of any diploma or grade record). The pupils can read the German bible now, and write German script. They can follow an Amish service without difficulty.

Every Amish service, which lasts at least four hours, starts with the old "Lobgesang," a hymn of praise. Then there is praying, preaching, and more singing. The text of the bible is read in High German, often with a distinctly dialectal pronunciation. One of the preachers criticized in conversation another's pronunciation. I heard myself **ihnen** read as "ihne," **Machen** as "mache," **Herr** as "Harr," **Vater** as "Vatter" (with very short a), etc. Afterwards in the sermon, the Bible text is explained in the native dialect: e. g. the answer given Judas after he had tried in vain to get rid of the money: "Du sieh du zu," was explained, "Sell is dei Business," Sell is dei Look-out." But the number of English loan-words in the sermon was, on the whole, very small. I did not hear more than a dozen in half an hour. The emphatic tone and the sublime subjects seem to have resulted in the avoiding of English terms that usually have more of a colloquial flavor. Many High German quotations from the bible were used. High German was consistently used for certain religious terms. They always said **heiliger Geist**, for **heelig** would only be said of a wound, that is as good as cured; **Fleisch** was used as the antonym of "spirit," **Fleesch** in the literal sense when the effects of the plague were described; they said **Glaube, Taufe, Gemeinde**, the last word emphatically instead of the more informal **Gmee (church-district)**. Some High German expressions found their way into the speech of every day life. An Amish minister asked his boy for a **Wurfschaufel** (which is mentioned in Matthew), but he understood only the word 'Shkoop" (scoop). This shows also how certain German (dialectal or High German) expressions in the dialect are crowded out by English ones, and only used by the older generation.

High German is also the language of the first half of their church paper: "Der Herold der Wahrheit." The editor of the German part, L. A. Miller, lives near Arthur. He is a farmer, but operates a thriving book store, in which principally bibles of all prices are sold, (up to 12 dollars). It is interesting to study the High German used in "Der Herold der Wahrheit." It shows (1) the influence of English; (2) the influence of the dialect and, (3) some archaic traits peculiar to the German of the times of Luther's Bible translation. The punctuation is partly English, the capitalization of nouns is not very consistent. If we take two issues of the paper, the one of January 15, and the one of March 15, 1937, we find the following traces of the influence of English: loan-words and parenthetic translations, typical for a bilingual state as e. g. **Pneumonia, Flu, Indigestion Editor, Pet,** (in parentheses with Liebling) **Neglect** (Vernachlaessigung), **Salvation** (Seligkeit), **Revival** (Erquickung). Furthermore we find translations of English idioms "die Mrs. John M. Yoder **ist nicht gar so gut** die letzen Tagen ("is not so well"; English word order!), eine **etlige Tags Reise** (English syntax!) was **will** noch werden? (English idiom: **will** instead of **wird**), bei des **Aaron Gingerich's**, Leichenreden **waren** gehalten (**waren** instead of **wurden**), **das meint** Verfolgung (**meint** instead of **bedeutet**).

The influence of the dialect is shown in passages like **dem Jonathan Fischer sein Buch, der Preis** wissen wir nicht genau; **es hat** noch mehr Kranke (instead of **es gibt** etc.); Otto **Begraebnis** (instead of Friedhof, **cemetery**); Schnee un **Dreck**; von dem Saemann, **wo** Samen aussaete; die kleine **Gemeine.**

We find archaic traits in the social column; Maria, **Weib** von A. Schrock; elsewhere; der **so** er lebt (archaic relative).

The dialect in the "Sprachinsel" shows no sign of decline. The number of speakers is identical with the total number of persons in the settlement. English is only used in their dealings with the "World." It cannot be doubted that the Pennsylvania German dialect will continue to be spoken by the Amish as long as they adhere to their old customs and beliefs, because they realize its closeness to the language of their holy books, and they find it useful to have a language of their own that makes them also linguistically different from the "World." The extremely conservative attitude of the Amish in every respect, is the most effective guarantee of a survival of the dialect, not only in this German **Sprachinsel** in central Illinois, but also in all the other settlements of the Amish Old Order.

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1.—Mennonite Church (membership in U. S. A. 47,253); Amish Mennonites (Conservatives), 1608; Amish Mennonites (old Order), 8,600; Church of God in Christ Mennonites, 2,700; Defenseless Mennonites, 1,500; Central Conference of Mennonites, 3,273; Mennonite Brethren Church of North America, 12,500; Krimmer Mennonite Bruedergemeinde, 1,850; etc. (According to FAMILIENKALENDER FUER DAS JAHR UNSERES HERRN 1937, ed. by Mennonite Publishing House, Scottdale, Pa. p. 44).

2.—Cf. C. Henry Smith, THE MENNONITES OF AMERICA, (Goshen, Ind., 1909).

3.—CENTENNIAL HISTORY OF THE MENNONITES OF ILLINOIS 1829-1929 (1931).